

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION
PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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GREG MITRE OF ILWU LOCAL 13, PCPA

INTERVIEWEE: GREG MITRE

INTERVIEWERS: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

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HARVEY: 00:00:00

This is Harvey Schwartz. I'm in Vancouver, British Columbia with Greg Mitre today. Today is the 17th of September, 2024 and this is part of the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association Oral History Project. And Greg, can you tell me when you were born and where you were born?

GREG: 00:00:23

I was born June 12, 1958, in San Pedro, California.

HARVEY: 00:00:29

Okay, tell me something about your parents, if you can, what countries they came from and what work they did.

GREG: 00:00:35

My father was half Argentinian and half Armenian, and his mother and father lived in Los Angeles downtown. He was born in downtown Los Angeles. And my grandmother worked as a cashier for Safeway, a union cashier for Safeway. And my mother grew up in San Gabriel, in a staunch Catholic family and attended the same convent that Lucille Roybal-Allard, who was a congresswoman who is now a harbor commissioner in LA, attended. And they moved down to San Pedro in the early '50s. My father loved to surf, loved the ocean, and so he moved the family down there in about 1952, I think. And my father owned a very small tire shop in downtown Los Angeles, where he catered to a lot of the new car dealers, changing out their wheels and tires. And that was a big Armenian enclave of tire dealers that were in Los Angeles, and my uncle started the business in the '20s, and my dad took over.

HARVEY: 00:01:51

Wow, was your dad at all political?

GREG: 00:01:54

Not the least bit.

HARVEY: 00:01:56

How about your mom?

GREG: 00:01:57

Not the least bit.

HARVEY: 00:01:59

Okay. They were Democrats, or any...

GREG: 00:02:07

I don't think they were. They weren't active at all.

HARVEY: 00:02:10

They weren't interested?

GREG: 00:02:10

My dad was a small business owner, and if anyway, I would say he probably leaned Republican because he was a small business owner. But they weren't active politically whatsoever.

HARVEY: 00:02:23

How'd that influence you in your own political thinking, if there was any when you were just a kid?

GREG: 00:02:28

It really didn't. I didn't become politically involved until after I got out of high school and I started my career and running around on the docks and being involved. My first job actually was bagging groceries as a retail clerk.

HARVEY: 00:02:44

Okay, was gonna ask you about youth schooling, early jobs? You just mentioned early jobs, but a little bit about your early life?

GREG: 00:02:52

Yeah, I grew up in a nice community of San Pedro. We had a nice home near the beach. I liked to surf more than I liked to go to school. So school was challenging, I didn't get great grades. My older brother got very good grades, my older brother Mike, was very, very intelligent and went on and got a master's degree. But I didn't follow in those footsteps. I graduated from high school and got a job in a market through my uncle, and was a member of the Retail Clerks [International Union] for a very, very short time, I was 15 years old. And from then, I started looking and hanging around on the waterfront, on the docks.

HARVEY: 00:03:37

Did you play sports in high school?

GREG: 00:03:41

Yes, I did. Yeah, I played tennis, I played volleyball, I swam, I did a bunch of--I did whatever I could.

HARVEY: 00:03:49

I gather, you know, you're very active in the athletic department.

GREG: 00:03:52

Yeah, I like to work out.

HARVEY: 00:03:54

Right, any military experience?

GREG: 00:03:57

No, no.

HARVEY: 00:03:59

Right. Okay, maybe then we can gravitate toward the fact that you ended up going to University of Southern California. You were on the polo team. Excuse me, water polo team.

GREG: 00:04:10

Coached, I coached water polo at USC.

HARVEY: 00:04:13

Oh you coached? How did you get into the position of doing that?

GREG: 00:04:16

My youngest son started playing water polo when he was eight or nine years old, and I had always swam and I played little pickup games, I never played competitively. But I learned the sport from a guy named Jovan Vavic, who was the coach at USC, and I coached his son in club when they were very, very young, because he was the coach of the university. And so my son and his son became very good friends. I coached club for about ten years, and then when my son went to high school, I decided to start coaching on the college level, and he hired me at USC.

HARVEY: 00:04:56

And your son, did your son play at USC?

GREG: 00:04:58

My son did eventually go to USC after high school, and was very successful. Won four national championships in four years at USC. He was a goalie.

HARVEY: 00:05:10

That's impressive. How do you learn to coach if you haven't played that particular sport?

GREG: 00:05:19

Two ways. One is water polo is a very easy sport to learn. It's very much like basketball and putting the ball in the goal and things like that. And you know, it's more of teaching kids to become athletic and learn how to swim and tread water at the same time. It's a team sport. If you don't play as a team, you don't win. And it's just something that when you have a guy like Jovan Vavic, who played as a very, very young child, played on the Yugoslavian national team, played on the Olympic team, when you have a guy like that teaching you, and you listen to him, it came very easy.

HARVEY: 00:05:59

Okay, that's great. Yes. [pauses] How did you gravitate toward getting into the ILWU?

GREG: 00:06:11

Well, it was interesting. My second job I got was as a deckhand on a water taxi, and I got that through a friend of mine whose father ran the water taxi. He was a skipper, and he kind of took me under his wing. And I think I was about seventeen years old. My older brother Mike was working down--and Mike was five years older than me, and he was working in the harbor. He'd got a couple jobs through the IBU [Inland Boatmen's Union], and this gentleman told me that if I went down to the IBU, I could maybe get a dispatch to this water taxi company and start working as a deckhand. So I did, and I started hanging around there, and I had a Volkswagen van that I used to sleep in. And so I would sleep down by where the office was, and whenever they needed a deckhand, they would knock on the window because they knew I was outside asleep, so I got a lot of work. And this gentleman who kind of took me under his wing, taught me the ropes and taught me about being a deckhand and how to run a boat, taught me how to run a boat and actually encouraged me to go get my license.

So I went to a class at Harbor Occupational Center in San Pedro, and then I went to another class at the Maritime Academy up in Vallejo, and it was a ocean operator class is what they called it, with a radar endorsement. So I went and got my license, and came back from getting my license and fell into a job at Catalina Cruises, where they were hiring. They needed experienced operators. They didn't need deckhands, they needed operators. So I went and kind of fudged my way into it and told him I had run a boat, run a water taxi, and they gave me a shot. I was twenty-one years old, I had just gotten my license, and I got a job as an operator Catalina Cruises.

HARVEY: 00:08:12

These vessels went out to Catalina Island?

GREG: 00:08:14

They were ferries that went back and forth to Catalina Island, carrying 700 passengers. They were 140-foot steel vessels. And another guy there took me under his wing, and he taught me there. I was a second operator for one summer, and then I was a first operator the second year I was there, I was the youngest first operator

they had ever had. And I really, really enjoyed that job. We didn't just go to Catalina. We did a lot of harbor charters around the harbors. We did whale watches in the winter. You know, we went to various places on Catalina. There's five camps on Catalina, Boy Scout camp, different institute, Marine Institute. So it was very interesting. I've always had a love of the ocean, I've always been drawn to the ocean. My father loved to surf, I love to surf. I love to swim in the ocean. So for me, it was almost getting paid to do what I love to do, go out on the water every day.

HARVEY: 00:09:09

So you had no college after high school?

GREG: 00:09:11

Very little. I went to USC for a very short time and studied political science and dabbled at maybe going to law school, but no. And then I went to Seattle. I went to Seattle Central Community College to get my tankerman's endorsement, which is another endorsement I got on my license. Got my tow boat endorsement to be a tugboat operator, because I thought I might want to go in that direction as I was working as a captain at Catalina Cruises. So I did a couple different things, and I never sit still. I'm always busy. I'm always active. So yeah, I dabbled here and there, but I ended up--Catalina Cruises was probably the most difficult job I ever left, of all the jobs I've had.

HARVEY: 00:09:55

And how long did you work at that job?

GREG: 00:09:57

Well, I actually did both after I got hired as a longshoreman, I still continued to run the boats part time. I worked there fifteen years and almost probably nine years that I was a longshoreman, I worked both jobs.

HARVEY: 00:10:10

Okay, and how did you get to the ILWU?

GREG: 00:10:17

Interesting story. I was working for the IBU, for Catalina Cruises when I first started and because I was not high in seniority, I was a young operator, the work was very seasonal. So I would only work about five months out of the year, May to September, October, and then we would get pretty much laid off. A lot of us would go on unemployment. Myself, the first year, I went to Indonesia and went surfing, went to Bali and went to Mexico, and I just took off. And then the second year, I remember that somebody told me that the ILWU was giving jobs to sister locals, and we called it extra work. That was before they had a structured casual hall. There was no casual hall. There was no casual--we didn't have identified casuals. So what would happen is--

HARVEY: 00:11:06

What year is this approximately?

GREG: 00:11:08

Oh, this would have been in 1981, '82. I think my first ILWU job was 1980. And what we would do is we would all meet on the corner near the dispatch hall, and one of our guys, and I was one of the guys that they elected would be the runner, and we would go into the ILWU dispatch hall, into a room on the side called the meat locker, and all of the sister locals, the fisherman's union, the scalers union, the IBU, we would all sit in there. And when they finished dispatch, one of the dispatchers would come out, and he'd say, "How many guys do you have?" And I'd say, "We have eight or ten or whatever." And he would hand me eight or ten jobs, UTR [utility

tractor rig] jobs, or whatever it was, and I'd go back down to the corner, I'd pass them all out, and we'd go to work for the day, and it was casual work. And that's how I got my first taste of driving UTR, shoveling in the hole, throwing bananas, all of those things that I went on to do later. My first taste was as an unidentified casual with the IBU.

HARVEY: 00:12:11

You remember your first day doing that kind of work?

GREG: 00:12:13

Yeah, I vividly remember it.

HARVEY: 00:12:15

Okay.

GREG: 00:12:16

Vividly.

HARVEY: 00:12:16

Can you describe it?

GREG: 00:12:17

Yeah, I got dispatched to a dock in Long Beach called Long Beach 208, and it was a banana dock, and the banana ship was there. I had been alongside a banana ship on a barge, but I'd never been on the dock side and been inside. I didn't know how it worked. And I got there, and, you know, I was with a couple of guys that were also casuals, and we handed our tickets to the boss, and the boss says, "Okay, you're in hatch four. Go down into hatch four, and you'll see the hatch boss is down there." And we went down, and we got on the ship, and we walked down into the hatch. And you know, none of us were prepared, we didn't have any gear or anything. We were in sweatpants and, you know, tennis shoes, sweatpants and a sweatshirt. And the boss said, "Okay, here's all the boxes. Here's the gravities," they call them, which are these conveyors that you set the conveyors up so you can slide the boxes along the conveyor. And then one guy stands at the end of the conveyor and throws them into the pocket. And he said, "I don't care what you guys do. I don't care who's doing what, but every other one of those pockets better be full of a banana box as it goes up out of the ship, or you guys are all going to be in trouble or going to get fired." So there was three of us, and we were down there, and we were at different hatches. So when he meant every other pocket, that conveyor is turning, and there's pockets in there, and you got to put a box in there every other pocket, because they're going to put another box above you. And we worked two hours on, straight, and then we had a two hour break, then we came back, we worked two hours on and we had a two hour break. And for two hours, we were throwing those banana boxes and hitting every other pocket, and it was very physical and very hard work.

HARVEY: 00:14:10

Yeah, bananas are sometimes famous for having bugs or tarantulas in there. Did you ever encounter anything?

GREG: 00:14:16

Yeah, lots of them. All the time, snakes, spiders, everything.

HARVEY: 00:14:23

Do you remember an incident around that in particular?

GREG: 00:14:25

Just, one guy came the next day and he had a welt on his arm the size of a softball from a spider bite.

HARVEY: 00:14:33

Oh my.

GREG: 00:14:33

Yeah, yeah. There was always something crawling around down there.

HARVEY: 00:14:41

Okay. Did you ever meet the Salcidos? Because I know one of the Salcido families that did some bananas, did a bit.

GREG: 00:14:51

Tony Salcido. Tony Salcido, Senior.

HARVEY: 00:14:55

Senior, yeah.

GREG: 00:14:56

Yeah. He used to work the dock there, and I would see him. That was a lot of guys, senior guys, but I didn't know any of them then. I was a newbie, you know, and we were from another union. And, I mean, we weren't accepted as ILWU members then. We were kind of extras, the casuals.

HARVEY: 00:15:13

And were you with the IBU?

GREG: 00:15:15

Yes.

HARVEY: 00:15:15

Okay. Right. Tell me about what it was like being a longshoreman. I mean, first of all, when did you get moved to getting something like a B card or an A card?

GREG: 00:15:30

Let's see. So I was a casual for about four years, and I think I got hired in the last application process that they had before they went to hiring only casuals with hours of experience. So what they did was in 1984, they were going to have a hiring, and they announced that they would be giving out applications for employment at the San Pedro drive-in theater on one day, from 9am to 3pm. People lined up two days before in campers to get an application. And I think they gave out 10,000 or 12,000 applications that day, and the line was miles and miles long. But people didn't realize if you came around three in the afternoon, you could have drove right in and got one. They gave out an almost unlimited amount, but we, nobody knew that. So we all waited. We had somebody park a camper in line. We took shifts and everybody, we wait. We went down there and we waited, and we went in and we got our applications. You filled out your application and you hoped to get an interview. That's what you wanted. If you got an interview, you had your, you know, a chance, a possibility of getting hired.

The interview process was lengthy, and they wanted to know if you had any qualifications. They wanted to know your background. They wanted to know a lot about you. The good thing was the interview process was

made up of men from the Membership Committee from the ILWU, and a couple from the employers group, Pacific Maritime Association. Luckily, I had a lot of qualifications that they wanted. I had worked on a boat, I worked on a ship. I was a captain, I operated a winch, I knew how to load stores from my days being on the water taxi. I had had a lot of different experience that a lot others hadn't. I had driven a forklift on the dock, I had loaded pallets. So I think I was a pretty good candidate to be a longshoreman. And so I did get hired, along with my brother, in 1985. And that actually was the turning point changed my life.

HARVEY: 00:17:55

How so, why do you say that?

GREG: 00:17:59

Well, I had always had, you know, not really a full time job, a part time job. I was trying to work my way into a full time job at Catalina Cruises. You know, guys there don't leave in the wintertime. It's not near as busy as it is in the summertime. So I hadn't worked my way up to quite yet a full time job. The benefits through the IBU, the health benefits were nothing compared to the ILWU. They were much, much less. The pension was not near as good as the ILWU pension was, and a lot of people used it as a stepping stone to try and work their way into the ILWU, because then the ILWU was known as one of the best jobs in the harbor.

HARVEY: 00:18:44

Exactly. What kind of work did you do by a large as a longshoreman?

GREG: 00:18:50

I did everything. I started at the very bottom. I was a lasher. I threw bananas for the first couple years. I started lashing, one of my favorite things was unlashing cars. I was a auto Lasher. They called it. And as you know, in Los Angeles and Long Beach, we get a lot of automobile ships. We usually get two or three a week, and they hire specific lashers to unlash the cars. Each person is responsible for unlashing about 250 cars, and you go in on the ship before the drivers do, you unlash the cars, you take the lashings, you move them to the side, and you prepare the cars to be driven off the ship. We would wear special knee pads, skateboarding knee pads, skateboarding elbow pads, we had a special little helmet on, we had these special little tacky gloves, and we would unlash the cars. And an average guy could unlash 250 cars, probably in about four hours, a little over four hours. We had it where we could do it in about two hours, and when you were done, you went home.

HARVEY: 00:19:55

I see.

GREG: 00:19:56

And instead of going to the gym, instead of going and working out, we would get a job auto lashing. We'd go and lash autos for two hours. You'd go home, you'd take a shower and you'd take a nap. It was very physical, but it was a great workout. And there was a group of us, that's all we did. And everybody kind of knew us as the auto lashers.

HARVEY: 00:20:16

You say you liked that job, because the physical work out of it and the timing.

GREG: 00:20:23

Got paid to work out. I didn't have to pay a membership to the gym, I got paid to work out. And like I said, we did it two or three days a week, and then we would supplement that with working on a passenger job sometimes, where we were throwing luggage, which was also a physical workout. There was a group of us, and

we were on the hull board, and we were known as the guys that liked to do the physical work. You know, it was a lot of fun.

HARVEY: 00:20:51

Okay, let's see.

GREG: 00:20:54

Well, and then from there I went--like every longshoreman, you start on the bottom. When you're an ID you're on the ID board, and you don't get a lot of choice of jobs. You work whatever job they give you a lot of times. As you work your way up the chain, up the ladder, once you get elevated off the ID board, in my day there was no UTR board, so you didn't have to go drive UTR or trucks. So you went on the hull board, and you had to spend five years on the hull board. The hull board is mostly lashing jobs, general cargo jobs, auto lashing, passenger, throwing baggage, things like that. So we did five years on the hull board. Then after five years on the hull board, you were eligible to go on just about any board you wanted. You go on the winch board and drive winches, you could go on the jitney board. You could do a bunch of different things. And I kind of, I dabbled in all of them.

HARVEY: 00:21:46

Were they still driving winches in 1985 to 1990?

GREG: 00:21:49

Oh, absolutely.

HARVEY: 00:21:50

Okay, that's what I thought. Containerization is coming, but it's not...

GREG: 00:21:54

Containerization was coming, but we still had winches. We even had standing gear. We had some frozen locker gear work, where we were doing shrimp and lobster and fish out of frozen locker still. We had general cargo. You know, I got taught by a couple guys: Dave Arian, [?Scotty Ulrich?], some of those guys taught me how to rig gear. I worked with a gang for a while, worked in the gang. I learned to drive winch from [?Scotty Ulrich?], and a couple others, and went on the winch board for a while before I became a crane operator. So I went to a CFS [container freight] station and worked CFS at night unstuffing containers, because that was physical work that I liked. And, you know, it was good work. And so I did just about everything down there. I was a linesman for a while. I was the linesman dispatcher. I was a steady linesman dispatcher for a company for a while that I did, but that was indoor work, sitting at a desk, and that didn't suit me.

HARVEY: 00:22:54

Okay. What was the worst job you did, from your perspective?

GREG: 00:23:00

Shoveling coal. I mean, when you talk to guys, they will tell you that shoveling coal down in the conveyors is one of the worst jobs there is. It's dirty, and you're down below ground, and you're shoveling petroleum coal that's fallen off a conveyor belt, or if a conveyor belt breaks. And you go down there, and you've got to wear a full suit and a mask and everything, and you come out of there and you take the mask off, and you look like a raccoon. And it's probably one of the toughest, dirtiest jobs down there.

HARVEY: 00:23:34

And the best job?

GREG: 00:23:36

For me, the best job was being a crane operator. I love being a crane operator.

HARVEY: 00:23:42

What do you love about being a crane operator?

GREG: 00:23:44

I like the challenge. I like the fact that you kind of controlled your own destiny. You got to control what you did. You were also the point of production. You know, the crane operator was and is the point of production. And if you have a good crane operator, than the ship does well. And if you don't have a good crane operator, well, it doesn't do so well. But I've always been athletic, and I like to be involved, and I like hand-eye coordination, things like that. It was very challenging to me, I liked the challenge.

HARVEY: 00:24:15

It would be less physically demanding than some of the other jobs you liked because of the physical.

GREG: 00:24:21

Yeah, it was more mentally challenging than physical. And I was getting older, and you know, I wasn't getting any younger, and I knew that. I wasn't going to be a lasher for the rest of my life. So I gravitated towards being a crane operator. I started in the smaller cranes that were on the yard side. And then I graduated up to the Hammerhead cranes, where I drove those and I really enjoyed it.

HARVEY: 00:24:51

That's great. At some point, your brother Mike, I believe, passed away.

GREG: 00:25:00

Yes.

HARVEY: 00:25:00

At what point was this?

GREG: 00:25:02

Mike died about seven, six years ago from now.

HARVEY: 00:25:07

Just that recently?

GREG: 00:25:08

Yes.

HARVEY: 00:25:09

Okay, so that's later, I remember, I do remember that.

GREG: 00:25:13

Yeah.

HARVEY: 00:25:13

Okay. What about labor disputes? Strikes, this sort of thing. Let's see, you're too late for the 1971-1972 strike.

GREG: 00:25:26

Interesting, I started--my first strike was at Catalina Cruises, and I led that strike. I was on the negotiating committee for Catalina Cruises, and that's where I actually got my start of labor negotiations and reading contracts.

HARVEY: 00:25:43

How did you get into that?

GREG: 00:25:45

Actually, I just fell into it. There was a group of guys at Catalina Cruises that were in the IBU that had kind of brought me along. Bob Forster was the regional director of the IBU, and he was a very militant union guy, and he was a great leader. And he kind of took me under his wing and started teaching me a little bit about contract administration, reading contracts and benefits and things like that. So we had a strike at Catalina cruises in--I want to say it was 1981 or 1982. Crowley Maritime owned the company, and they were traditional union busting. And we had our demands, and they didn't want to meet them, and so we went on strike. They brought in scabs, and they ran the boats with management, and we tried to sabotage the boats. And we were very active. We got support from the ILWU and some others, and after about three weeks of being on strike, I think, three weeks or a month, they pretty much caved to our demands, and we went back to work.

HARVEY: 00:26:55

How do you sabotage a boat?

GREG: 00:26:58

There's a bunch of different ways. Not to incriminate myself, but when you're a captain, and then there was--we had two captains on the boat and four deckhands. We didn't have an engineer on the boat, and so the one of the captains every run would go down and check the engines. So we had to know a lot about the engines and how the boats ran. And when you do learn that, you know that closing one valve, or turning one switch, or shutting off a compressor, or something like that makes it so that the boat's not going to run, it's not going to leave the dock. And when you have a guy that doesn't know the boat, and they bring some scab on there who doesn't know it, and then he gets on there and tries to fire the boat up, or get it ready to put passengers on to take to Catalina, it's not going to leave the dock. So we did some clever things, and we tried to throw as many monkey wrenches in the plan as we could for them and made it as difficult on them as we could.

HARVEY: 00:27:58

Did you guys encounter scabs and sort of have discussions with them?

GREG: 00:28:04

No. Crowley's professional at that, Crowley was professional. It was interesting, because previously to that, I went to Seattle Central Community College to get my tankerman's endorsement, and I came back and I got a dispatch to Crowley on their tank barges. Two weeks after I came back from getting my tankerman's endorsement, the IBU lost all of the work at United Towing and another company, Red Stack, to the SIU [Seafarers International Union], who came in and took all the jobs and undercut the IBU. And Crowley was the one who actually initiated the entire plan, and they brought in a substandard union with substandard wages, and they put about 400 guys out of work. So I had a little taste of Crowley and a little taste of--I knew what they were capable of.

So at Catalina Cruises, when they took us out on strike, we knew that they were professionals at strike breaking. They had the scabs come in vans with tinted windows, they would drive them right up to the gangway. They would protect them. They had security guards. We couldn't get near them. We tried to find out what hotel they were staying at. They would drive around to different hotels and pretend like they were dropping guys off and not drop. They spent a lot of money and a lot of subterfuge to try and get it out of letting us have a piece of them. And we really didn't get to have a one-on-one with the guys that were running the boats. And some of them were management guys. Two of them were management guys that we had worked with, the port engineer, all of our lives almost that we had worked there, and this guy was up there running the boat. And that really steamed us, that really got us mad.

HARVEY: 00:30:03

That's about the time the IBU, because of the SIU, the IBU will come into the ILWU, approximately that time.

GREG: 00:30:12

Yes.

HARVEY: 00:30:13

It's interesting. It's all at the same time. So you were initiated into, you know, kind of a pivotal, important moment.

GREG: 00:30:20

Yeah, and the IBU after Catalina Cruises closed--and Catalina Cruises, ironically, was put out of business by a non-union operator in the Port of LA who started running the mail to Catalina and now has a monopoly and runs six, seven boats and is non-union, and actually put Catalina Cruises out of business--But when Catalina Cruises went out of business, it decimated the IBU, and the IBU, really, in Southern California, hasn't recovered since.

HARVEY: 00:30:54

Wow, it's amazing. Can you think of any other major landmark events, things that you--posts you held, things you did?

GREG: 00:31:10

I was involved in the Columbus Canada. I don't know if you know the story about the Columbus Canada. Columbus Canada was a vessel that came to Matson from Australia, and it was loaded in Australia with scab labor when the MUA was on strike, the Maritime Union of Australia came to Matson. We got wind that it was loaded by scab labor, and so we put up a picket line and we wouldn't work the ship. And I was working at Matson then, and I think [?Scotty Ulrich?] was the president of Local 13, and the arbitrator came down. The arbitrator ruled that our picket line was secondary, that it wasn't a bonafide picket line, and he was going to try and force us to go to work. And the ILWU took a stand, said, "We're not going to work scab cargo. We're not going to work this ship." So it sat at the dock for a couple of days. The employer thought that we were going to get ordered to go back to work, and we didn't. So they took the ship out and they put it at anchor, and there were negotiations back and forth between the ship owner and the Australians and us in Southern California. They ended up taking the ship back to Australia, unloading all of the cargo, loading it with unionized manpower, unionized labor, bringing it back, and then we unloaded it. So we sent it back to Australia. We told them, "You load it with union guys. You load it with guys that aren't on strike, and then we'll touch, we'll handle the cargo."

HARVEY: 00:32:46

This is during a big Maritime Union of Australia, huge, big beef? I remember.

GREG: 00:32:51

Yes, I think it was in the 90's.

HARVEY: 00:32:55

I think it was in the 90's also, I think it was the 90's. Was your brother Mike active in union?

GREG: 00:33:02

Yeah, very. My brother was the president of Local 13 for two different terms. My brother was the one who encouraged me to run for the executive board in in the late 80's, early 90's, when I was becoming involved.

HARVEY: 00:33:17

What did you do before that? Were you on committees before that?

GREG: 00:33:21

Yeah, I was on a couple committees. Yeah, and I ran for executive board--shoot, I don't know it was probably 1990 or '89, I can't remember. And then I was on the executive board for sixteen or seventeen consecutive years. I think I was the longest sitting executive board member at Local 13 at one time.

HARVEY: 00:33:43

Really?

GREG: 00:33:44

Yeah. I liked being on the executive board. I was on a lot of the committees, like the scholarship committee. We started the scholarship committee Dave Serrato and myself. And then I got into contract, reading contracts and contract administration and learning about contracts, and I really enjoyed that. Like I said, I almost went to law school, and my brother should've went to law school. And my brother was very smart, and he kind of showed me, taught me the ways and told me, "If you don't have it written down, you don't have anything. If it's not written in the contract your employer is not going to adhere to what they say. You've got to get it in writing. And it can't say 'may' and it can't say 'might,' it must say 'shall' and 'will.'" And so that's how I kind of gravitated towards being on the executive board and dealing with some of the beefs and the the labor relations and firings of guys and arbitrations. I like that stuff.

HARVEY: 00:34:56

If you had an idea of a law school, you have to get an undergraduate AB. That would have been that would have entailed a lot of extra work.

GREG: 00:35:04

I have enough credits, I got my AA, and I was probably working towards my BA. I was going to USC and taking business law courses and some other courses, political science courses. I So I went to school even though I was working, I would take night classes. They had satellite classes, and so I would take those that were near the port, near my home in San Pedro. And my brother got two master's degrees from Long Beach State. So I think we both liked learning and going to school. And it worked both ways. The education that I was getting helped me on my union side when I would go in there, when I was dealing with an arbitrator like Dave Miller. You know, Dave Miller was an arbitrator who could be a real prick, and if you didn't know the contract, he would run all over you. And so, you know, my brother told me, "Don't go into an arbitration with Dave Miller unless you know what you're talking about."

HARVEY: 00:36:09

That's very interesting. Any outside politics, were you enrolled anything with any political organization on the outside of the union?

GREG: 00:36:20

No, I mean, I was not real politically active, but I was politically active in the union. I was always supporting whoever the union supported, and whatever candidates from our area that ran and were politically active and that stood up for labor. I would support them.

HARVEY: 00:36:45

Okay, you know, let me just check something. At some point--well, first of all, you were on the executive board. Did you have other offices as well in the local?

GREG: 00:36:58

No, not really. I mean, committees, you know, I was on a bunch of different committees, and then I was a caucus delegate for a long, long time. I went to all the caucuses and conventions. And then later on, I think it was 2008 was my first negotiations, where I was elected to be the alternate to the negotiating committee. And so I was the alternate from Local 13. And back then, Local 13 was, like they are now, the largest local, so they always sent two negotiators. They sent their negotiator and the alternate to the table. The big table, we called it. And so in 2008 I was sent to San Francisco to be the alternate negotiator for Local 13.

HARVEY: 00:37:45

What do you remember about those negotiations?

GREG: 00:37:49

2008 was not a highly contentious negotiation. 2002 the lockout was something that was--I was not a delegate then, I wasn't a negotiator then, but I was involved. And during the lockout, we learned a lot about our employers and their direction that they wanted to go, and the fact that they locked us out instead of us going on strike. Some of the things that happened because [George] Bush was in office, he invoked the Taft-Hartley Act, ordered us to go back to work. A lot of that was to me, very interesting. And so in 2008, I really wanted to be on the negotiating committee, because I thought we might be going in the same direction, and I thought I was prepared. I liked the fact that the membership and the caucus delegates had a lot of faith in me and put me in a place where I could make a difference.

HARVEY: 00:38:50

Yeah. In 2002 you said you were involved. What did you do, yourself?

GREG: 00:38:59

Well, it was interesting, because when they locked the gates, it took us by surprise. We didn't know that they were going to lock the gates, obviously. And as a union, when you're locked out, you have a couple of options. You can sit back and do nothing, or you can be counteractive. You can mobilize the forces, you can use it in your to your advantage. That's exactly what we did. Instead of our members going golfing, and going surfing, and going to the beach, or going camping, or going and spending time with their families, we almost took it as a strike, and we formed picket captains, and everybody on the executive board had a dock, and you had a dock that you were responsible for, and then you had a list, and everybody had to show up at that dock at a certain time. And we picketed that dock 24/7, 'round the clock. And we were there day and night for the entire ten day

lockout. We had campfires, we had people bringing us food. Guys would bring their camper van down or their mobile homes. And we were sleeping in there, we had a kitchen set up in there.

It was very interesting, because I think it was about four or five days in, one of the reporters in Southern California, came and said, "Why are you guys--" Came down to interview me and he says, "Why are you guys on strike? What's the issue?" I said, "We're not on strike. They locked the gates. We're ready to go to work. That's why we're here. We're standing here ready to go to work. That container ship standing behind me," I said, "We're ready to work it." I said, "Those boats are sitting there, and we're ready to go to work." And it flipped the script. And I think that the employers--I think that really hit home, to the employers and to the public, that we got our message out that we weren't on strike. We got locked out, and we were still negotiating with them, we were still at the table, and they chose to lock the gates. And instead of us going away like I think they thought we would. We went down and we protected our jurisdiction. We went and we manned the picket lines, and we said, "Hey, we're here. We're ready to work. Nobody else is going to do our work. But when you're ready to unlock the gate, we'll go in there and we'll do our job."

Were you down there in your dock yourself or [inaudible]?

Oh yeah, yeah. LA 87, I'll never forget it. I was right next to the cruise terminal, too.

HARVEY: 00:41:31

Okay. Did you stay overnight down there?

GREG: 00:41:35

Yes, we stayed there for ten straight days. A friend of mine had a van, I had a Volkswagen van, and another friend of mine had a van. I was the picket captain, so that was my dock, and we had a structure. Some guys were days, some guys were nights. We pulled a six hour shift. It was six ons, and then another group would come for six hours, then the night shift would come for six hours. And we were there 24/7. And you know what? We had pizzas and we had food. All the local merchants were bringing us food. We had more food and donuts than you could ever eat. We had the support of the community. It was really, it was fantastic. I thought it was great for the membership. It really got the membership activated, got them involved, and it was a cohesive thing that brought us together.

HARVEY: 00:42:26

I saw some of that in San Francisco. [pauses] At some point, just make sure we're here. You got injured at some point, as I recall?

GREG: 00:42:47

I did.

HARVEY: 00:42:49

And that sort of changed your activity in the union.

GREG: 00:42:52

Changed my life.

HARVEY: 00:42:54

Yeah, can you go into that at all?

GREG: 00:42:56
Yeah. Give me a second.

HARVEY: 00:43:01
Yeah, I was going to see.

GREG: 00:43:06
Yeah, I broke my neck. Broke two vertebrae in my neck, and had a plate and screws put in.

HARVEY: 00:43:14
Approximately what year?

GREG: 00:43:15
2005. October 10, 2005.

HARVEY: 00:43:21
Do you care to describe how that came about?

GREG: 00:43:24
It was an accident that shouldn't have happened. It was my fault, pretty much, and I had a fall, and I was in a hurry, and I was, you know, doing something that I shouldn't have done anyway. Got hurt.

HARVEY: 00:43:39
What kind of product was that?

GREG: 00:43:41
I was on the crane. I was in the top of the crane, booming the crane down in the rain.

HARVEY: 00:43:49
Okay, and then--That was 2005, did you say?

GREG: 00:44:00
Yes, 2005.

HARVEY: 00:44:01
And how old were you at that time? You were [born in] '58?

GREG: 00:44:03
I have no idea. I was about fifty.

HARVEY: 00:44:03
Forty-five, forty-seven something like that. Anyway, okay, so you took early retirement at that time. And then, after getting it, you went through all kinds of medial stuff?

GREG: 00:44:26
Yeah, I had three surgeries, two surgeries before they actually went in there and put the plate and screws in. When they did that, it kind of changed my life, and I was never going to be able to drive a crane again. I didn't

want to be a clerk, and I didn't want to be a boss, and I always wanted to be a longshoreman, and so I decided to retire. I took a disability retirement. Really took the amount of years I had, and I retired.

HARVEY: 00:44:51

Sure, how come you didn't want to become a clerk?

GREG: 00:44:53

I liked being a longshoreman. I liked the fact--I just like being a longshoreman, and I like being a crane operator, and I just didn't want to be a clerk and I didn't want to be a boss.

HARVEY: 00:45:10

And how soon after that do you become involved in the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association?

GREG: 00:45:15

Almost immediately. [laughs] I got recruited, almost immediately.

HARVEY: 00:45:21

By whom?

GREG: 00:45:24

Well, there was a group of guys. Herman Moreno, Hugh Hunter, Tony Salcido were a group that first got me involved. And then I went to my first PCPA convention, and then they sicked Rich Austin on me, and then Rich Austin got his hooks in me, and then the rest is history.

HARVEY: 00:45:47

Rich is not to be denied.

GREG: 00:45:49

No, and I learned an incredible amount from those guys.

HARVEY: 00:45:54

What about Dave Arian? Were you involved with Dave Arian?

GREG: 00:45:56

Oh, absolutely. I was involved with Dave Arian from before I became a longshoreman. Dave Arian came to me when I was working for Catalina Cruises, he knew I was a captain, and he asked me--and if you know Dave Arian, you know that Dave knows how to delegate, and Dave knows how to get things done without Dave doing them. God bless his soul. He came to me, and he said, "Hey, I want to take these college kids that are labor students out on a boat tour." And I said, "Wow, that's a great idea, Dave." And he goes, "Yeah, I want to get him involved. I want to show them all the different unions and the different facets of harbor life and harbor labor." And I said, "Okay, that sounds great." He goes, "The only thing is, is I need a boat." And I said, "Oh, okay. Well, I work for Catalina Cruises, go down." And he goes, "No, we don't have a budget. I need you to go and get the boat for me."

So I went to my boss at Catalina Cruises, and I told him what we were going to do, and he agreed to let us have the boat. And we took our first class. It had to be, I would say, 1982, and they were from Cal State Pomona, or somewhere out in the Inland Empire somewhere. And we took a couple hundred kids on there, and they were all Labor Studies students, and they were absolutely mesmerized by the cranes and by the harbor. Many of them

had never been to the beach and never been on the water. And Dave did a phenomenal job of putting that together and bringing these kids down there.

And that was the beginning of a long relationship that I had with Dave, and where we became really, really close. And, you know, between him and Diane Middleton, and some of the things that they did, it was actually incredible. He's the one who actually kicked me in the rear and told me to get involved, to become active.

HARVEY: 00:48:05

Were you involved with his campaign when he ran for president?

GREG: 00:48:09

I was, yeah. I was.

HARVEY: 00:48:11

What was your job?

GREG: 00:48:12

I stayed on the mainland when they went to Hawaii, and I kind of did all the mainland stuff. And, you know, did some of the organizing of the campaign and things like that. But yeah, I was a big supporter of Dave's. I like Dave's politics.

HARVEY: 00:48:30

Sounds good. Okay, let's see. So you become active in the PCPA. What'd you do for the PCPA?

GREG: 00:48:43

Whew, I did everything. I mean, I think they volunteered me to become the secretary treasurer the first year I was there. and I was the president of Local 13, the Southern California pensioners right away, because their president was a woman named Penne Lavery, and she wanted to step down, so they roped me into that job right away. And I was the president of Southern California pensioners, went to my next convention, and Rich Austin asked me to be the secretary treasurer, which I agreed. So I was a secretary, then I was the financial secretary for a couple of terms, until Rich decided to step down, and then they asked me to be the president. So I ran for President, and I was the president of the PCPA for seven or eight years, I think.

HARVEY: 00:49:32

Yeah, that's what I recall. What kind of problems do you have to deal with as president of the PCPA?

GREG: 00:49:40

Well, what you have to do is, I mean, the pensioners of the ILWU are very unique in that most industries, when you become a pensioner, you're not really relevant to the active workforce. Pensioners usually kind of go away, and they go do their own thing. Some of them move to Arizona, some of them move to the Colorado River. You know, some of them just, they fade away, they fade out of their industry. You know, when you talk to people that have been in other unions all around the world and all around our country, they don't go back to their jobsites, they don't go back to their active workforce, and most definitely, they usually are not included in the contracts that are being negotiated going forward. That's the absolute uniqueness of the ILWU, and that's one of the beauties of the ILWU, is the ILWU takes care of their pensioners. They care about their pensioners. They make them inclusive, they make them relevant. They make them feel welcome.

You know, I got to listen to Harry Bridges speak once, but I saw Dave Arian as president, Brian McWilliams, James Spinosa, Big Bob [Robert McEllrath], Willie [William Adams], all of them not only held a special place in their heart for pensioners, but they always made them feel welcome and included and part of the union. And it's reflected not just in what they say, but what they do. You know, they allow them to sit--the pensioners have a representative on the negotiating committee. That's unheard of in other industries.

HARVEY: 00:51:37

Yeah, and you were involved in which negotiations? '08?

GREG: 00:51:44

2014, I was the alternate to the pensioners, and they sent me to the negotiating table. I was with Rich Austin.

HARVEY: 00:51:52

Oh, yeah, that was a long--

GREG: 00:51:55

It was a long one, eleven months. Second longest we've had, to the last one.

HARVEY: 00:52:01

Right, to the last one. What do you remember from that as a highlight that impressed you regarding your own service, especially on the negotiating committee?

GREG: 00:52:14

You know, being a pensioner and being on the negotiating committee is a very delicate position, because you don't want to overstep your bounds, but you want to make sure that the active workforce and the actives that are at the negotiating committee and especially the officers realize the issues that the pensioners are facing. One of the things that I thought was very, very important was the fact that some of the older pensioners, and especially some of the widows and surviving spouses, were not addressed and being taken care of. And that's something that, you know, I was really proud that Rich Austin, Dave Arian, those guys really understood that you take care of the old guys, and you take care of the old spouses, because longshoring--you know, when I came in, it was the tail end of the physicalness of longshoring, and all of the old guys that I knew when I was a longshoreman when I first started, they were beaten up, and they had been working hard jobs all of their lives. These guys, you know, they weren't--it was a very physically demanding job. So by the time you were fifty, fifty-five years old, you were beat up. And that's one of the things that I kept seeing on paper, was that longshoremen don't take a big percentage of their pension because they don't live very long. The lifespan of a longshoreman in the 50's, 60's and 70's, was not very old because these guys were very, very beat up. They had major issues to their bodies. And we had a lot of surviving spouses, but not a lot of surviving longshoremen. So I thought it was important that we take care of the older longshoremen that were alive and especially take care of their surviving spouses.

HARVEY: 00:54:14

Seems to me, if I remember right, in that negotiations took so long...Big Bob was president. They got some pretty good concessions, as I recall, from pensioners. I think, if I'm remembering correctly.

GREG: 00:54:30

Well, that was when we had what was called the dependent verification, where they went after all of our dependents, and they wanted to trim some of the amount of healthcare that they were paying, and that was a big change. The pension has risen pretty steadily through the years. But what I'm most proud of is that in the last

negotiations, we went back and we got some of the largest increases for the retirees in the last negotiations than we've ever gotten. And you know, it was after COVID, and it was after the employers had made a great deal of money during COVID, and there was a lot of high expectations from our members and our pensioners. So it was difficult. It was really difficult for us as a negotiating committee, and it took us fourteen months to negotiate that contract.

HARVEY: 00:55:30

Yeah, the last one?

GREG: 00:55:31

The last one, yes. And a lot of people sat back and thought that it was going to be a very easy negotiation because the employers had made so much money. I mean, absolutely astronomical amounts of profit were made during COVID. Companies were making 12,000% more than they made pre-COVID. Evergreen was giving bonuses to some of their employees that equaled two years pay, because that's the structure they had in their contracts and they had made so much money in profits. And so there was a lot of expectations, and we went into negotiations, and the employer took the exact opposite stand. Said, "We have all this money now. We're going to take on the ILWU. We're going to take you on, starting with healthcare." And so it took us three to four months for us to just get maintenance of our benefits and get our healthcare signed, where we had everything that we had before, which was maintenance of benefits, then we moved into the other parts of the contract. And it was difficult, you know, we dealt with automation.

HARVEY: 00:56:43

Why do you think they made so much money during COVID?

GREG: 00:56:48

That's an interesting question. I will tell you my personal opinion, and I don't know--I like to read the papers and I like to watch the financial news channels. But, when COVID first hit, I think everybody thought the world was going to stop, everybody, including our employers, including all of our manufacturers around the world, everybody. So when COVID hit, everybody slowed down and started to slow things down and stop. Well, the American consumer especially did just the opposite. He stayed home and he went online and he started buying things. And there was such a glut of cargo that we weren't prepared for. When I say we, I mean the maritime industry and the shippers, they weren't prepared for it, and they had thought the opposite was going to happen. And suddenly all of this cargo started coming to the United States. We couldn't keep up, number one. Number two, the rest of the country is caught in the grip of COVID. Everybody's staying home. Everybody, all of the industries, transportation industry, truckers, the rail, everything. Everybody was staying home. Nobody was on the freeways, nobody was doing anything.

So these container ships kept coming, and we were doing the best we could of isolating the dispatch hall so people wouldn't get sick. We moved the ID's to another dispatch hall. We separated people. We let people have comebacks that usually don't have comebacks. We let people stay on the job, instead of having to come back to the dispatch hall. And the cargo just piled up. We had 109 ships at anchor off of LA-Long Beach Harbor at one time. We had so much cargo that they told the ships, "Don't leave China. You're not allowed to leave. Don't come over here, because we're not going to let you anchor off of San Pedro. We're going to make you stay 30 miles outside, outside of Catalina or San Clemente Island." And God bless our members, they just, they kept coming to work. And I think we had 42 people die, total up and down the coast of COVID.

HARVEY: 00:59:06

Yeah, very sad. I'm aware of that sort of. How did you deal with automation, which is toughie in that contract, this last contract?

GREG: 00:59:21

Well, we had already had two automated docks in LA-Long Beach Harbor, and as everybody knows, our contract allows for automation. Our contract allows for our employer to introduce labor saving devices, and it allows for them to bring automation. And that's the contract. And you you work by the contract, that's the Bible. And when it says that, then you've got to live by it. What it also says is that any jobs that emanate from automation will be ours, the ILWU's. So you've got to go take that employer to task, and you've got to tell them. You've got to be very, very specific in saying that if you're going to automate any job that's created out of that automation we're going to do. And I don't care if it's punching in keys on a board, or a job that you're now doing in Utah or Arizona or in China somewhere. If you're going to automate that dock and all that automated equipment has to be operated somehow, it has to be calibrated, has to be run, those OCRs, those cameras, all of those things have to be maintained and serviced. That's our work.

So what we did in the 2022, negotiations, is we formed an automation agreement that made a uniform automation agreement that every single employer is going to have to abide by if they choose to automate their terminal. And it calls out for how many longshoremen, how many clerks, how many longshoremen mechanics will be hired and employed as per how many pieces of equipment they have, automated equipment. And there's a ratio for so many pieces of automated equipment, you're going to have a mechanic. And I'm hoping that when I'm dead and gone, that that automated agreement will make the ILWU still the relevant workforce on the West Coast, because I will tell you right now as I sit here, there are three automated terminals in LA-Long Beach. Within the next ten or twelve years, I think there's going to be probably ten.

HARVEY: 01:01:38

Yeah. What was your impression of Willie [Adams] during the time? Because that was the contract--He was the president. He was president the International at that time.

GREG: 01:01:55

I will tell you that Willie and I were good friends, and I've traveled the world with Willie. And when Willie became president, I knew that Willie was going to have to negotiate the 2022 agreement. And Willie was not a young man, and I knew that Willie was probably going to be a one or two term president, because he was going to be aged out. But Willie had been a clerk in Tacoma, Willie knew longshoring, and Willie has a very, very interesting personality in that he's a very kind, gentle person. And when you look at a kind, gentle person, you don't think of the President of the ILWU. It doesn't fit the mold.

But I will tell you this, Willie was an incredible leader when it came to the negotiating committee. He did an incredible job of keeping the committee focused, keeping us in line, and there was a lot of big egos on that negotiating committee, and he did an incredible job across the table with our employer, making it known to our employer the way that Willie could that he wasn't going to stand for getting pushed around, and he wasn't going to allow them to do things that they thought that they were going to do because he was the president.

And when it came time for us to negotiate our healthcare, and they came after us, they wanted to change the structure of a lot of our healthcare: our pharmaceuticals, our chiropractic care, our co-pays, all of those things they wanted to come after. They told us, "It's too expensive. You guys are the most well paid. Our health plan is so expensive, costs are skyrocketing for health care all around the country. We can't afford it." Willie looked him dead in the eye and said, "You're making billions of dollars. Not only can you afford it, you're going to

afford it. You're going to pay it, no ifs, ands, or buts." And I was very, very impressed by the way that Willie handled himself, by the way he handled the committee, and especially by the way he handled the employers.

HARVEY: 01:04:08

How did he handle the committee? You say there's some egos.

GREG: 01:04:11

You gotta remember, there's fourteen guys in that room from all around the coast, and they're very--everybody wants a piece of the pie for their own membership. And a lot of guys have different interests. You know, you got guys from small ports and big ports, and you got guys that are mechanics, and you got guys that are longshoremen. You got guys that are clerks. It's just, it's a very difficult balancing act.

HARVEY: 01:04:39

Do you have any specific recollection of how he managed everybody?

GREG: 01:04:44

You know what he did that was really impressive to me, is he would always go around the table and he would get everybody's opinion. He would let everybody be heard, and he would take a consensus. And it's interesting because, you know, I was there in '08, I was there in '14, I was there for the extension, and then I was there for 2022 bargaining. So I saw the way Big Bob handled it, and I saw the way that Willie did it. I don't think when I was on the negotiating with committee with Willie, I don't think we took one or two votes where we actually had to vote, where we said, "Yes, I'm in favor of this," or "No." It was more of a consensus where we talked it out, we went around the room, we talked about why we were going to do something, or why we thought it was good for everybody, why we would go in that direction, why that was really good for the Union and the membership, and Willie led it. Willie was instrumental in doing that.

And we had a couple issues, couple things that were tough to swallow. Automation is not easy to swallow when you tell people that you're going to lose 200, 300 jobs off of a terminal, you know, when a company comes in and just changes the way they do business. And it was difficult, but I think we came out of it with a good agreement. I have to give credit to Willie, I have to give credit to Bobby, and I have to give credit to Frank and Cam the two coast committeemen, because, you know, without them, and without a lot of their knowledge and insight, and, you know, they've laid the groundwork. You know, I think, I think the ILWU is on pretty good footing, firm ground that they're going forward. We're going to be relevant. We're still going to be the relevant workforce on the West Coast.

HARVEY: 01:06:36

Can you contrast Willie's leadership with Big Bob's a little, just to sketch?

GREG: 01:06:42

Yeah well, I mean, glaringly, Big Bob is a big guy who's not afraid to tell the employer to fuck off. Willie doesn't operate that way, and that's not Willie's style, and that's not Willie's personality. But Willie, when he had to, put his foot down, picked up his notebook, looked at the entire negotiating committee, and said, "Come on, we're out of here," and we just left. And the employer would sit there and say, "Wait, wait, wait, where are you going? I thought we're negotiating." "Nope, we're done. We're done. We're not going to entertain this. We're not going down that path. We're done. Goodbye."

HARVEY: 01:07:25

Can you remember a specific issue?

GREG: 01:07:27

We had a couple on healthcare, absolutely. Yeah. And to Willie's credit, that's another thing. Willie's a very passionate person, and he's a very compassionate person. So when you talk about healthcare and you talk about healthcare for the elderly, you know we were trying desperately to get long-term care. Long-term care is one of the only benefits that we don't have in the ILWU, and it's a critical, critical issue that's facing people all around our country, and especially our longshoremen. Long-term care is so expensive that it can decimate families, can wipe out people. You can lose your home. I personally have experienced that in Southern California with some of my pensioners. We fought and we fought to get long-term care, and our employer did not want to give in, and they wouldn't give in. And we fought, and a couple times Willie said, "Come on, get up. We're going to leave," or, "We're done for the day." And he was making a point. And he was making a point to the employers of how important it was. And for him to do that, because that's not for the actives, and that wasn't for him, that's for pensioners, that's for people that are going to get older, that's for people that have come way before him, to be able to fight for that, to be able to do that, and to show that to me, the pensioner rep who's sitting there, for me to be able to go back to my membership and say, "We fought for two and a half months for long-term care, was the last thing we took off the table before we got maintenance of benefits for our healthcare." That, to me, was impressive.

HARVEY: 01:09:11

Yeah, that's good, that's great. I do have to ask you a question in little bit different topic. That election in 2018 remember, there was a difficulty. This is when Panama was still in the union, and there was a question about a box with ballots. Can you at least cover that, talk about that a little bit?

GREG: 01:09:40

Yeah. I mean, I was very involved in bringing the Panamanians into the union, starting with the pilots.

HARVEY: 01:09:48

Oh, that's right, that's right.

GREG: 01:09:50

Yeah, it was very unfortunate the way the 2018 election went down, because the company that we used--

HARVEY: 01:10:00

Why don't we first sketch what you did? Because I knew you did a lot around helping with that, to get the Panamanians into the ILWU to begin with.

GREG: 01:10:09

Yeah, Ray Familathe is the one who started it. Ray Familathe had a relationship with one of the pilots. And Ray asked me to go down to Panama with him and meet with them, and so we went on a couple different occasions, and we met with the pilots. We discussed them coming into the union. They had previously been affiliated with the Masters, Mates, and Pilots, the MMP, you know, which is a United States union. We went down there and we spoke with them. And Ray had a really good relationship with them, and they were interested, so he brought them up, and actually in one of the negotiations, Ray brought them up and sat them at the table with the employers, and I forget which year it was, and kind of used them as leverage, and it was very interesting. But they voted to affiliate with the ILWU, the pilots. There's about 275, of them. And we brought them in, and they were part of the union, and I thought it was a great thing. It was very unifying, and it was showed solidarity. And it was a very strategic move bringing them in.

HARVEY: 01:11:27

And you went down with Ray Familathe to Panama. What'd you do yourself at that moment? What did you do in terms of dealing with the people in Panama? What was your role?

GREG: 01:11:43

Mainly talking to the pilots and, you know, kind of explaining them who the ILWU was. You know, representing the ILWU and what we stood for. You know, a couple of their leaders knew who we were, but the rest of them didn't. And they were kind of wary. They had been in a US union before, and they didn't get any service, they didn't get a lot of representation. And so they were kind of hesitant, I think.

HARVEY: 01:12:09

Were they still in the MMP at that time?

GREG: 01:12:11

No, they decertified. They pulled out.

HARVEY: 01:12:15

Okay, ultimately, the longshore workforce [in Panama] comes into ILWU, too briefly.

GREG: 01:12:22

Yeah, the longshoremen, there was a big, giant group, I think there was about almost 2000 of them, and they voted to affiliate with us also.

HARVEY: 01:12:33

Well, then, so, I know you had an active role in helping that come about. I was aware, but I thought we should talk about it, and what happened with the 2018 election to get...

GREG: 01:12:45

Well, I mean, when you have affiliates that are in another country and they're affiliated to your union, you gotta afford them the right to vote. So in Panama, it's very difficult for them to vote by mail. We do the voting by mail. One of the most unique things is, in Panama, they don't have mail service to homes. They don't deliver to your home. They just don't have that. There's no federal letter carrier union. So everybody has, like, a PO Box or, you know, you send things in the mail, and the mail is not very reliable in Panama, either.

So anyway, to make a long story short, they were mailed ballots, just like everybody else was mailed ballots in the US and Canada. And the people that I knew in Panama were worried about the fact that they didn't trust the mail service, they didn't know if it was going to get there or get back, etc, etc. So they were waiting and waiting, they didn't get their ballots, the ballots weren't coming. And everybody in the US got their ballots, everyone Canada got their ballots, they didn't get their ballots. So they were sending me letters, they were sending me messages, and the ballots weren't coming. And I said, "Well, I'll check into it." I called GES, the company that we had used for the balloting, and and they said, "Yeah, we sent them, and we'll try and track them. We'll find out where they're at." And they kept looking, "Okay, they're in the balloting center in Panama City or something, or the mail center, but they haven't been dispersed yet to the separate areas where they go."

So finally, the ballots get there. When they get there, the union there of the longshoremen, they're concerned that the ballots took so long to get there that they're not going to get back in time. So they take it upon themselves to take the ballots, distribute them to members, have them vote, give them back to them, and they

put them in a box, and they were going to ship it back--freight, air freight, because they knew it would come back.

Well, they sent me a picture of the box in a message and said we sent them back in this box. And I said, "No, stop! You can't do that! It says in there, you've got to mail them back individually. And it also said no postage necessary if mailed to the United States." And they said, when they took it, one or two guys took it to the mail place down there and tried to give it to them, they said, "You got to pay to put stamps on it." And so they were like, "Oh, we thought this was pre-paid mail," and they didn't want to have to pay. These guys don't make a lot of money. And so there was a lot of problems, there was a lot of confusion, there was a lot of problems with it. So their executive board, like I said, took it upon themselves, to collect them all, put them in a box, and mail them back. Well, our constitution states that you can't do that. You can't mail them back en masse, you can't have the union collect them. So they ruled them ineligible, and they didn't allow them to be counted, and they didn't allow them to vote.

HARVEY: 01:16:10

Did they mail them to you?

GREG: 01:16:11

No, no, no. They mailed them to San Francisco, to the address where the ballots were supposed to go.

HARVEY: 01:16:20

Okay, so they went to one, 188 Franklin Street?

GREG: 01:16:22

No, not even there. Wherever the ballots were supposed to go, the ballots didn't go Franklin Street. They sent it to where the ballots were supposed to go. So the balloting committee, when they got them, said, "This is a box that came all together," and they ruled it as ineligible ballots. So the Panamanians didn't like that and thought that their democratic right to vote had been stripped, and the pilots, who--the pilots are--they're they're a different group of workers in Panama compared to almost everybody else. They're more sophisticated, they're educated. These guys have big master licenses to operate vessels, these guys have all gone to schools in the United States or somewhere, maritime schools. They're educated, sophisticated guys. They stepped in and they were sending messages to GES, the balloting company, saying, "We're concerned. We think you should come down here. We think that maybe you should come down here with ballots and hold the balloting here. We're concerned the ballots aren't going to get back in time. The longshoremen are telling us, the ballots aren't going to get back in time," and nothing was done, and they didn't, they didn't address their needs. So ultimately, not only the longshoremen, but the pilots felt disenfranchised and felt that their their democratic right to vote also wasn't addressed, and therefore they both decided to pull out of the ILWU, yeah. And it was unfortunate, was very, very unfortunate.

HARVEY: 01:18:11

Yeah, of course, of course. Some people blamed you, and you know, I'm trying to figure out was what's--I mean, how is that, given the story, how's that figured?

GREG: 01:18:25

People didn't want to count those ballots because they were afraid those ballots might have been for a candidate that they weren't supporting, or it might have swayed the election and somebody else might have won. Whether that's true or not, you'll never know unless you count the ballots. Personally myself, I think those guys in Panama were all voting for a candidate that they knew and that they supported and that they had known their

whole affiliation time with the ILWU. And I think that might have been the case. We'll never know that, because they took away their right to vote. They didn't count their ballots.

Yeah. Let me take a look at my notes here. Thank you for going into that, I know that was a tough situation.

Yeah, it was what it was.

HARVEY: 01:19:12

Yeah. Anything more about marriage and family life? You know, you've been married a long time, your son was on four championship teams at USC.

GREG: 01:19:25

I'm married to a ILWU, longshore clerk. She's a great woman, and she loves the union. She loves working as a clerk. She's still working right now. She's coming up upon retirement right now. She did exactly what I did and worked her way up from a casual, she was a longshoreman, she lashed, she ran around on container ships, she drove a top handler, she operated heavy equipment, and she worked her way to become a clerk, and now she's a supercargo, which is a clerk supervisor. And she really likes her job, she's very, very good at it.

And, you know, looking back on my life, everything that I have, really and that my kids have, I owe to the ILWU. My son got lucky enough to get accepted to USC, which is a very prestigious school, but it's also very expensive. If I wasn't a longshoreman and my wife wasn't a longshoreman, I don't think we could have afforded to send him there. You know, just everything that I have, you know, my home, my cars, all the things that I enjoy is because I was afforded membership into the ILWU. There's a lot of avenues my life could have taken. Like I told you, the hardest job I ever quit was driving the boats to Catalina, but looking back on it now, it was the best decision I ever made.

HARVEY: 01:21:02

Yeah, I think that's pretty clear. Did I miss anything major?

GREG: 01:21:14

No, I don't think so. I think you covered everything.

HARVEY: 01:21:19

Any last statement you like to say?

GREG: 01:21:22

I mean, like I said, I've been blessed. I've been blessed beyond means, and that's one of the reasons why I've been active in the PCPA and I give back, and that's the reason that I try and stay involved, and I try and do things for other guys that are coming up, young ILWU workers, young guys that I meet. I'm very active in the scholarship committee in Southern California, and I'm active with some of the younger workers and what we call the ID's, you know, our class B's. I go and speak to them a lot. They have a meeting, a separate meeting, and as you know, we have a lot of them now. We have about 1800 ID's in Southern California. And so they have a day meeting and a night meeting, and I'll go and I'll speak, and I'll try and instill some of the values that were taught to me by some of the old time longshoremen that came before me, about you take care of the job, it'll take care of you. If you don't take care of the job, don't expect it to take care of you.

HARVEY: 01:22:24

Do they call them B card guys? I mean, do you use that term B?

GREG: 01:22:29

Yeah, yeah.

HARVEY: 01:22:39

I think we kind of got it.

GREG: 01:22:40

I think we covered a lot.

HARVEY: 01:22:43

We did.